CLEAN WATER ACTION
CALIFORNIA

January 31, 2011

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Philip Isenberg, Chair
Delta Stewardship Council
980 Ninth Street, Suite 1500
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: **Scoping comments for EIR on the Delta Plan**

Dear Chairman and Council members;

On behalf of Clean Water Action and its 85,000 members, I am please to submit the following comments on the proposed Delta Plan and environmental review document. We have already signed in support of the joint environmental comments and the comments of the environmental justice community, but would like to highlight some water quality issues. As a long-time stakeholder on the Bay-Delta Public Advisory Committee sub-committee on Drinking Water Quality, Clean Water Action has long stressed the need for upstream actions to protect water quality in both the primary and secondary planning areas of the Delta. In addition, Clean Water Action is a leader in promoting the protection and restoration of groundwater quality and we are very interested in assuring that this plan will advance rather than block that goal.

Plan Objectives

A key objective of this plan is to "Promote statewide water conservation, water use efficiency and sustainable water use." This effort cannot be restricted to offsetting any reduction in Delta exports, but must be defined in such a way as to reverse the worsening overdraft of groundwater aquifers, particularly in the Central Valley.

The objective to "Improve water quality to protect human health and the environment consistent with achieving water quality objectives in the Delta" is poorly stated. Water quality in the Delta is inextricably linked to water quality through the Delta watersheds. Point source and nonpoint source pollution that impacts groundwater quality in the San Central Valley also impacts the rivers that feed the Delta. In other words, improving

water quality to protect human health and the environment *will* help achieve water quality objectives in the Delta.

Project Description

It is difficult to comment on a proposed project that has yet to be defined. Clean Water Action suggests that a second scoping period by allowed after the publication of the range of alternatives to be studied.

Meanwhile, we recommend adding the following components to the water quality plan;

- Ensure that ecosystem improvements and other projects advance rather than delay the timetable for attaining water quality objectives for methylmercury in the Delta;
- Protect and improve groundwater quality in source watersheds to offset increased demand for surface water supplies.

Potential Environmental Effects

Air Quality. any impact on air quality must be considered significant due to the cumulative impact of current air quality.

Climate change. The impact of climate change on water supply in the San Joaquin Valley should be studied. Alternatives that increase reliance on surface water supplies will be much more heavily impacted because of evapotranspiration, heat-related water quality concerns such as algae and the need to maintain cold water reserves, and an anticipated reduction in water supply reliability due to more frequent drought. Alternatives that do not address groundwater overdraft also are more heavily impacted by climate change.

Hydrology and Water Quality. Any proposed changes to Delta inflows will impact water quality on a local basis. Impacts should be assessed for different areas of the Delta – for instance a loss of fresh water flow to the north Delta, or an increase in salinity in the South Delta due to more inflow from the San Joaquin River. This report should additionally investigate "hot spots" for contaminants in the Delta -- including mercury, PCBs, and algae -- and identify how changes in exports or flow may impact those hot

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spots.

The alternatives studied will employ a varying degree of source control; the impact of greater or lesser regulation of point source and nonpoint source pollution should be included in this analysis. At least one alternative should consider regulation of the discharges of all confined animal feeding operations; currently only dairies are regulated.

Additionally, decisions on exports and conservation will impact groundwater quality in the San Joaquin Valley. Irrigation water currently makes up the majority of aquifer recharge in the Valley;[1] therefore, changes in the quantity or quality of that water directly impact water quality. Since 90% of San Joaquin Valley residents rely on groundwater for all or part of their drinking water supply, this is a potentially significant impact. For example; improved agricultural water use efficiency will reduce the yield of local groundwater aquifers: improvements in export water quality or in agricultural soil and nutrient programs will improve groundwater quality potentially make more water available; and current agricultural practices will result in a predictable rate of overdraft and degradation of groundwater quality and availability; a decrease in groundwater quality adds to the demand for surface water as water systems seek to replace yield lost to contamination.

Mitigation

Methylmercury**.** The water quality objective for methylmercury in the Delta includes requirements that the exposure of subsistence fishing communities be reduced; this document should identify how that exposure reduction could be implemented in the event that actions in the Delta Plan exacerbate or delay cleanup.

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1 Faunt, Claudi C. Groundwater Availability of the Central Valley Aquifer, California, US Geological Survey, July 2009

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Groundwater protection. Current groundwater regulations are not sufficient to prevent aquifer overdraft in the event that Delta exports are reduced, or to improve groundwater quality. This document must identify an environmental superior alternative that protects Central Valley groundwater supply and quality through mandatory groundwater management actions.

Thank you for allowing us to submit these additional comments.

Sincerely,

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